

ADDITIONAL VIEWS BY SENATOR JOHN GLENN

Committee on Governmental Affairs

Special Investigation

March 10, 1998

The Minority report analyzes in exacting detail the results and conduct of the investigation as well as the Majority report. As I look at what the committee has wrought following the passage of Senate Resolution 39 authorizing the investigation, I am struck as much by what the committee didn't do as by what it did do.

Among other things, the committee should have examined in more detail the need for better law enforcement through the FEC for campaign finance violations. Larger penalties and quicker investigations of allegations might concentrate the minds of potential violators better than the current system in which the FEC is underfunded, understaffed and hamstrung in reaching decisions in difficult cases. But this isn't the main lacuna in the committee's investigation.

It is astounding and symptomatic of what is wrong with our political system that a high-profile investigation of our campaign finance system could be carried out by Congress using millions of dollars of taxpayer money and only the Executive Branch is put under scrutiny. It is an incontrovertible fact that every abusive campaign finance practice described in the committee's hearings last summer happens on Capitol Hill with regularity, yet this committee shied away from investigating its own. It is an omission that deserves serious criticism. The American people are not stupid. They know that their lives are being affected much more by the extraordinary amount of political money from home grown special interests for Congressional campaigns than by whatever money may have slipped into our political system from abroad and not been caught. They have no faith that Congress will make major changes in reforming the system, and the events of recent years, including this year, show that their skepticism is justified. But we must keep trying, and doing it by half steps may not work.

Since 1976, I have supported complete public financing of federal campaigns. This investigation has reinforced my conviction that moving to a system of complete federal financing is the best way to clean up our campaign system. It is, I believe, the only way to stop the chase for campaign dollars, and the only way to stop the sale of access to elected officials.

This investigation has shown the appalling lengths to which individuals will go to exploit access to elected officials for their own end. Whether they are individuals residing in other countries seeking to enhance their own stature, or people in this country seeking approval of specific projects, legislation, or the awarding of contracts, they have the potential ability to pressure our elected officials to favorably view their special agenda by virtue of the officials' need for campaign funds. And if they didn't think their money had at least the potential of buying something, they wouldn't spend it. It is a fact that the investigation uncovered no hard evidence of campaign funds affecting Congressional votes or Executive Branch policy, but even the appearance of such quid pro quos can be as corrosive to public trust as the reality. The best way to ensure that our government and our politicians are not exploited in this manner is to provide

clean money from the federal government for federal election campaigns -- money that truly represents the interests of all the people, not special interests.

I believe that the elimination of soft money, i.e., unlimited contributions from corporations, from unions, and from individuals, and the regulation of campaign ads funded by special interests must go hand in hand, and are two key elements in reforming the system. I am firmly convinced that this can be done without running afoul of the First Amendment. The reforms of the McCain-Feingold proposal would be salutary in correcting some of the worst abuses of the campaign finance system. But the passage of this bill should only be considered a first step in reforming of the system. For as long as election campaigns are driven by private money there will be inevitable temptations to bend, if not break, the rules in order to gain an electoral advantage. And clever people can devise clever loopholes.

This investigation has revealed attempts to bring money from abroad into U.S. elections, numerous instances where contributions have been laundered through individuals to hide the true sources of the funds, and it has revealed many examples of the selling of access by both parties via campaign contributions.

Until we finally move to a system where the government funds our federal elections, these problems will continue to exist, and will continue to undermine the American public's confidence in its elected officials and its government. While the Congress has shown no interest up to now in reforming the system in this fashion some states have illustrated more imaginative thinking along this line.

The state of Maine has adopted a "clean money" state-financed system for funding elections, and a dozen other states are contemplating similar action. It appears that we shall have to look to the states for leadership in this area.

Finally, without necessarily disagreeing with the additional views of any of my Democratic colleagues, I wish particularly to associate myself with the additional views of Senator Akaka.